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6 January 1954

CIA COMMENT RE JIC 641/4,

"MAGNITUDE AND IMMINENCE OF SOVIET AIR THREAT
TO THE UNITED STATES"
(29 October 1953)

The following comments have been prepared within CIA, in the light of the fact that the JIC paper has been used as a basis for presentation to the NSC, to indicate the relationship between the JIC paper and existing National Intelligence Estimates on the same subjects. Since the JIC paper has not been circulated outside the JCS, no attempt has been made to coordinate these comments with the other agencies represented on the Intelligence Advisory Committee.

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. JIC 641/4 covers questions of Soviet capabilities and intentions recently considered in NIE-65, NIE-90, NIE-95, and SE-36/1.* The JIC paper runs to the end of 1957, beyond the period covered by any of the above estimates. With respect to Soviet capabilities, the JIC conclusions (amplified in Enclosure "B") are in general accord with the estimates. However, after due allowance for the difference in time periods, the JIC paper departs from existing National Intelligence Estimates in the analysis and conclusions concerning Soviet intentions (paragraph 8-10 of the Conclusions and supporting Enclosure "A").

* NIE-65, "Soviet Bloc Capabilities through 1957", dated 16 June 1953
NIE-90, "Soviet Bloc Capabilities Through Mid-1955", dated 11 August 1953
NIE-95, "Probable Soviet Bloc Courses of Action through Mid-1955", dated 25 September 1953
SE-36/1, "Soviet Capabilities for Attack on the US through Mid-1955", dated 3 August 1953

2. In discussing the "Imminence of the Threat," the JIC paper appears to be considering only the chances of the Soviets deciding, with something like malice aforethought in the legal sense, to initiate general war by an air attack on the U.S. In order to assess the likelihood of air attack for planning purposes, it is surely essential to consider not merely air attack in itself, but the likelihood of general war coming about in any way -- for it must be assumed that in any general war the Soviet would attack the U.S. by air at a very early stage.

3. If, then, the problem is really the likelihood of general war, the JIC analysis appears defective in taking up only two ways by which this could happen, namely "Soviet desperation or Soviet judgment." National Intelligence Estimates have consistently stated two others, neither of which appear to fall within the JIC's (or the ordinary) meaning of "desperation". These are Soviet over-reaching in pursuit of some local advantage and, last but not least, just plain miscalculation. Thus, the NIE's have stressed the continuing chance that "a series of actions and counteractions, initiated by either side, would lead to general war even though not intended by either side, to have that effect."*

*NIE-95, para. 3. We note that Enclosure "B" of the JIC paper, paragraph 21, does refer to these avenues to war, in much the same terms as NIE's. However, the paragraph is unrelated to the conclusions stated in main paragraphs 8-10, which refer for their back-up to Enclosure "A" rather than Enclosure "B". The two enclosures appear to have been prepared without reference to each other. In any event these points should be stated in main conclusions, to avoid misunderstanding.

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4. This difference in analysis is not merely a difference of method, but importantly affects the tone of the conclusions. If the intelligence community had been asked to project its present estimates of Soviet intentions through the end of 1957, it is unlikely that the projection would differ either with the conclusion (JIC, para. 10) that it is "more likely" — i.e. that the chances are greater than 50% — that Soviet "judgment" will be against general war, or with the conclusion (JIC, para. 9) that we cannot now foresee anything within this period that is "likely" to induce Soviet "desperation." But, for a fair total picture, the additional possible avenues to general war must be stated, and the wording of the final conclusion must be shaded (if only to counter the human inclination to infer "it will not happen" from "it is not likely to happen"). To illustrate the difference, and its impact upon the reader, we have, in Annex A hereto, placed the JIC conclusions alongside the key conclusions of the recent NIE-25. It seems to us that the wording of the NIE gives a much fairer and more useful picture of the uncertainties of the problem, uncertainties which would multiply in scope and importance as the period of projection is extended to a full four years.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

5. We will not attempt to spell out all the "possible" ways by which general war might come within this period, and which should compel a shading in the conclusions of any discussion of the subject. Some of the most serious possibilities would be:

a. Under the heading of "a series of actions and counter-actions" leading to general war "though not intended by either side to have that effect," the present situation in Indochina is highly

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susceptible to such a series. Korea appears somewhat less so at the moment, but the chances of action by Rhee, or of later action by stepped-up North Korean forces, are certainly substantial, looked at over a four-year period.

b. Under the heading of events inducing Soviet "desperation," the U.S. ring of air bases and growing U.S. air power are of more than propaganda concern to the Soviets and might induce such a feeling within this time. Moreover, we have consistently estimated that, if West Germany were firmly integrated with the West and substantially rearmed, the Kremlin might — or even would probably — regard this as a threat to Soviet security requiring drastic action.* At this moment, such a West Germany seems remote, but the chances of the prospect changing in four years are substantial, in light of the gigantic strides made by West Germany in the similar period since Adenauer was first elected in the fall of 1949.

c. It should be noted that the above examples of possible avenues to war necessarily assume that Soviet policy is affected, in some degree at least, by Western courses of action and by developments which, although they may not directly threaten the heart of Soviet power, nonetheless erode Soviet prestige or approach

*For example, in NIE-99 (20 October 1953) it was stated that:

"The importance attached by the Soviet rulers to West German rearmament is such, however, that they might react to it by measures which would enhance the risk of an East-West clash in this area [Germany]" (para. 2h)

And in NIE-81 (22 May 1953), the current estimate of Soviet intentions in Germany, it is stated (para. 10) that: "there can be no doubt that the Kremlin regards West Germany as potentially the most powerful state in Western Europe, and as potentially the most dangerous, both to the realization of Soviet aggressive plans and to the security of the Bloc." (The estimate goes on to say that through mid-1954, the Kremlin is likely to regard German developments as not yet dangerous and as offering chances for Soviet political warfare.)

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Soviet territory. There is some implication in the JIC paper that the Kremlin makes decisions on the use of military means without regard to such factors. Such an implication is not supported in National Intelligence Estimates, and this Agency clearly rejects it as a general proposition.

6. Nothing in the foregoing comments is intended to imply that we regard general war — and resulting air attack — as "likely" (better than 50% chance) within this period. Moreover, existing NIE's by implication, and our own views, are in clear disagreement with the view of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, the Joint Staff, that the only uncertainty is one of timing, and that Soviet attack sooner or later is inevitable. (JIC Enclosure "A", p. 7.)

7. On the subsidiary point of what degree of threat would induce Soviet "desperation," we note the difference in view between the Director of Intelligence, U.S. Air Force, and the Director of Naval Intelligence. On the one hand, DI/USAF says that "Soviet desperation can result from any event that so challenges the Communist program or the Soviet regime as to indicate the possibility of their failure." If by "failure" is meant merely a lack of success in attaining Communist objectives, we do not believe that this describes a situation in which the Kremlin would be likely to launch an air attack on the United States. D/NI, however, says that Soviet desperation "will result only from a conviction that Western strength and actions pose a grave and imminent threat to [Soviet] security." We agree, and have so stated in NIE-95, that such a conviction might lead the Kremlin to initiate general war.

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